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# Parental involvement in the education of the handicapped child

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# PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF THE HANDICAPPED CHILD

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss parent involvement in the education of the handicapped child. Parents have a far reaching influence on the life of their children. It is commonly accepted that home environment and child-rearing practices influence school achievement.

This paper will attempt to show that the more directly involved the parents are in their handicapped child's education, the greater the benefits for the child. Some questions considered in the paper are the following: What can be done to improve the parents' attitude and behavior toward their handicapped child? What are the rights of parents and the handicapped child presented by PL 94-142? What type of involvement should the parents have in their child's academic program?

There are two general categories of parental involvement - indirect and direct. Indirect involvement is parental feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward the child; which all affect school achievement. Finding the correct placement for the child and being involved in the planning of the individual education program are also considered indirect involvement. In addition, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, P.T.A., parent workshops, etc. are included

under indirect involvement. Direct involvement is the actual teaching of the child. There currently are three types of direct involvement: total teaching by parents, reinforcing what the classroom teacher is teaching, and instituting behavior management techniques.

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parents affect all aspects of their child's life through their attitude and behavior toward the child. Cunningham and Barkley (1979) state that the behavior of the child depends not only on the child's personality and abilities, but also on the conditions of the child's environment and the individuals that interact with the child. A number of writers have reported that parent-child interactions are associated with the development of such affective variables as self-concept (Coopersmith, 1967), locus of control (Lefcourt, 1976; Pharer, 1976), achievement motivation (Smith, 1969; Veroff, 1969), and self-expectation for future success (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978). These studies have found that warm, supportive but also reasonable demanding parent behaviors are associated with higher levels of achievement and more positive affective states in their children. However, Battle and Lacey (1972) noted that mothers of overactive boys appear more critical and disapproving and seem to have acquired a generalized negative set of expectations which adversely influence their perception of and response to the child. Also, a study by Chapman and Boersma (1979) showed that mothers of learning disabled children reported more

negative reactions to typical achievement events and outcomes. This study also showed that the mothers of learning disabled children expected their children to perform less well in school.

## Parent Counseling

With the multitude of studies showing how parents influence a child's self-concept, achievement, success, etc. and studies reporting either negative feelings and/or behavior of parents of learning disabled children, one can easily see the need for and importance of counseling for the parents of the learning disabled child. Just as early identification of the learning disabled child is important for remediation, so also is early counseling of parents important for the future success of the child.

When the parents first learn their child is handicapped, whether it be in infancy or later during the school years, it is an agonizing experience. The Delineated Loss model advanced by Kubler-Ross (1969) can be applied to parents dealing with the experience of having a handicapped child. The stages of this model (Huber, 1979) are the following: denial - this may be showed outright or just by ignoring the condition; anger - which may be directed toward professionals, other parents, the child, God, or themselves; bargaining - working long hours with the child, finding the right specialist for treatment or school program which will make the child normal, or making promises to God; depression - when an awareness develops that the situation

is real and at present unchangeable, depression usually follows; and finally acceptance - parents accept the child as is, appreciating the assets and tolerating the short comings. Two indications of the parents reaching the stage of acceptance are the degree to which they function in their usual manner by continuing their associations with their friends and the degree to which they meet the needs of their normal children as well as those of the handicapped child.

While the parents progress through these stages, their attitudes and feelings toward their handicapped child will change thus changing their behavior. Often their interaction with the child can be detrimental. Through counseling, the parents can sort out their feelings, develop an accurate perspective on their situation, and learn to accept their child. Counseling can be done individually, or in groups. Sometimes different educational programs for handicapped children also have counseling groups for parents. The individuals in these groups discuss their personal feelings of having a handicapped child, the different aspects of their child's handicap and different techniques that they can use at home to interact with their child.

Auerbach (1961) states that the goal of counseling parents is to help them explore all aspects of the situation in which they find themselves with their child, to gain greater knowledge and understanding of the child's physical and emotional development, to look at their own role as parents, and to become aware of the complexity of parent-child relations.

The Parkway Day School in Illinois, as reported by Bricklin (1970),

is an example of parents enrolled in a counseling group when the child is enrolled in the school. The purposes of this counseling group are: to provide the parents with information concerning learning disabilities; to help parents understand and cope with their feelings of the child; to provide a liason between home and school, so there is a coordinated consistent approach; to help parents understand the behavior of their child; and to help the parents set more effective limits for their child.

Many counseling programs just focus on one area. The Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1970) focuses on the interaction of parent and child. It is based on the concepts of problem ownership, "no lose" interactions, and active listening. Another program to help parents interact with their child is the "C-Group" developed by Dinkmeyer and Carlson (1973). Participants present practical problems to the group. Through involvement with the group, they share ideas in the solution of problems. The participants make a public commitment to take the tentative solution to their home and use it in an effort to solve their problem. A third program is "Managing Behavior: A Program for Parent Involvement", developed by McDowell (1974). This program is designed to assist parents in the acquisition of behavior management skills. A workshop format is used to provide the necessary instruction and feedback as the parents choose a behavior to be managed, select a method of recording the behavior, and apply consequences to the behavior in an effort to alter it in the desired manner.

The parent workshops reported by Hoffert, Lichtenstein, Altman and Byne (1979) led parents to a heightened awareness of the pressures and emotional stresses their children live with daily. This workshop was composed of simulations illustrating input difficulties in the areas of visual functioning, tactile discrimination, directionality and fine-motor problems, concept formation and reading. The workshop enabled parents to give their children the kind of support which is as essential to their ultimate development as any remedial techniques, and also to accept their children as they are. The future for handicapped children will depend on the dynamics of their home situation. Not all activities should focus on the parents, but helping parents work through their adjustment problems also helps their handicapped child.

## Parent Rights

As the parents are working through their feelings and learning about their child's handicap they also must find a proper educational placement for their child. This used to be a very serious problem for parents of most handicapped children. However, since the passage of PL 94-142 which guarantees a free and appropriate public education to the handicapped, it should only be a problem for the parents of the very young child. The law also provides an opportunity for parents to actively participate in the development of their child's individual educational program within the least restrictive environment. This

puts a great responsibility on the parents. In order to do this the parents must know the different aspects of the law governing their rights and the rights of their child. The parents should also be aware of the various special programs and what they offer. Different parent groups can help the parents find the appropriate answers but the school personnel should be responsible for educating the parents; for if there are any problems with the child's placement, it may be the parents against the school in the courts.

The federal statutes provide for parental involvement in two ways: 1. Parents must give consent to any proposed evaluation and must give consent to any proposed changes in their child's educational status or program. 2. Parents must be invited to the planning and placement team where decisions are made about the eligibility, program, and placement for the handicapped child. It is a fundamental principal that consent is legally sufficient only when it is obtained after full disclosure of all material information by the person seeking consent to the person from whom the consent is sought. Pryzwansky and Bersoff (1978) state that the school system must tell parents all of the hearing rights available to them, describe the action the school proposes to take with regard to the student, and describe any options the school considered and the reasons why those options were rejected.

With regard to evaluation, the parents should be given a description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report the agency uses as a basis for the proposal. This means the psychologist and/or other evaluators must anticipate what instruments or other modes of

assessment will be used and describe their purposes. Pryzwansky and Bersoff (1978) suggest the following methods for insuring that undue influence does not prevent consent: (a) imparting correct information; (b) giving parents time to consent; (c) giving parents names, addresses, and telephone numbers of persons or advocacy groups with whom they can consult for advice and information; (d) giving parents the opportunity to bring with them anyone they choose to a consent conference; (e) abstaining from any threats concerning loss of rights otherwise due parents should they refuse to consent; (f) reminding parents that they have the right to revoke consent if they choose to do so. Counselors or other school personnel can help parents understand their rights by providing them opportunities to examine the following questions proposed by Burggraf (1979): Have you, the parents, consented to the educational and psychological evaluation of your child? Have you received an adequate explanation as to why your child is to be evaluated? Do you agree that the results of the evaluation will be helpful in planning your child's educational program? What are your concerns about your child? Do you know what tests will be given your child and for what purpose? When you participate in conferences, what information do you want to receive? In periodically evaluating your child and the effectiveness of the educational program, what do you hope to find?

In a study by Hoff, Fenton, Yoshida, and Kaufman (1978) it was found that parents were unaware of the right to introduce information at the placement team meeting or to challenge information. Parents

were often unaware that certain decisions had been made during the placement team meeting and they were unsure of final recommendations. These findings indicate that parents who have attended the placement team meetings may be more informed about their child's learning handicap, but they are unaware of the special education program designed to meet their child's educational needs. The school again has the responsibility to translate for the parent the decisions about the evaluation, eligibility for program, program placement, annual goals of program, short-term instructional objectives for child, and the system for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. If the parents have been informed of their rights, have been given all the necessary information surrounding their child's evaluation, and time has been taken to make sure that the parents understand all the facts, they should be able to participate in the establishment of their child's individual education program.

Next to having a positive, accepting attitude toward their child, taking a part in establishing their child's individual education program is very important for the parents as well as the child. For if the parents have indeed helped in the formation of their child's program, they should be able to understand and tract their child's progress and to evaluate and monitor the program for its effectiveness. The parent must constantly keep in mind that the program is supposed to be structured to the needs of the child not to the handicapping condition. A good workshop for parents to help them prepare for the individual educational program meeting is made available from the

Council for Exceptional Children (Nozzaro, 1979). The purposes of the workshop are to help the parents become more knowledgeable about educational programs for students in special education, to provide the parents with specific information about how individual education programs are developed, to provide a dry run at participating in an individual educational program meeting, to give the parents some practice speaking up for what they believe is important for their youngsters to learn, and to prepare for the actual individual educational program meeting.

## Parental Involvement

### Indirect Involvement

Now that the handicapped child is in a program, the parents should not sit back and let the educators take over. For many parents and educators this is the common practice. The only involvement the parents have is during parent-teacher conferences, home visits, PTA, being room mother, etc. This type of contact with the school is very minimal. The parents and teachers have to know one another and know how each is interacting with the child in order to become a team for the benefit of the child. The parents need to know what skills their child is learning to master, the steps taken to master the skills, and the progress that is made. The teacher needs to understand the total child - home environment, culture, interests, and interactions with family members. Some of the above can be learned through parent-

teacher conferences and/or home visits. However, a constant dialogue should be maintained between home and school not just two or three times during the school year.

Direct Involvement

Research states that the more direct involvement the parents have in their child's education, the greater the benefits for the child (Kelly, 1974; Granowsky, Middleton & Mumford, 1979; Roland & Perrone, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Breiling, 1976; Gath, 1979; Rodin, 1971). Involving parents directly in the child's school program is a time-consuming, demanding, and at times a frustrating task. Unless the administrators and the staff are truly committed to parental involvement, it is not likely to succeed. In addition, the parents might need some coaxing to take on this new job. Some factors which may make parents hesitant to become directly involved in their child's education are the following (Gorton, 1977): parents may not have enough time; they may not be sure how to get involved or if the school really wants them to get involved; they may feel they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to get involved in school affairs, thinking that teachers and administrators already know what is best; and the parents may have previously had a poor or bad experience. The teacher who knows the parents of the children in the class and can communicate openly with them will be able to work through any of the above problems with the parents.

Meaningful parental involvement is most effectively fostered through a parent-teacher dialogue which stresses both equality and

charity. The teacher and/or administration must also take responsibility for having the parents acquire the skills and confidence to work with their child. Depending on the parent, a variety of behavior management, reinforcement, and teaching techniques may have to be learned. In addition, to help the parents achieve success while working with their child on each skill or lesson, the teacher should: define and describe in observable terms the skill to be learned; develop a detailed lesson plan; model the procedure for the parent; have the parent attempt the procedure; give feedback to parents as to how they did; alter the procedure based on the feedback, if necessary; give a specific time limit to the procedure; discuss with the parent a good time of day for the child and parent to work together; show the parent how to record progress; and set a future date to evaluate progress and make new lesson plans. It is important for the parent and child to achieve success when first working together. Thus the teacher should make the beginning objectives easily attained. As the child becomes more accustomed to working with the parent and the parent feels more confident, the objectives can become more challenging.

Most programs developed specifically for direct parent involvement are those involving preschool children or children involved in a special reading program. Many of today's preschool programs are an outgrowth of the headstart programs that were begun to help the so-called "disadvantaged" child. The programs range from total

teaching by parents, to reinforcing skills taught by teachers, to behavior management techniques. The Portage Project (Shearer & Shearer, 1972), which consists of total teaching by parents, instructs parents in their homes what to teach their preschool child, what to reinforce, and how to observe and record behavior. A home teacher comes to each child's home with an average of three to four prescriptions per week and any materials needed to carry out these activities. First, the home teacher takes postbaseline data on the previous week's activities. Based on these data, the home teacher alters the prescriptions or introduces new activities. Baseline data are then collected on each new task, the task is demonstrated to the parent as the home teacher works with the child. The home teacher then observes the parent working with the child on the prescription. Often the home teacher supplies the parent with additional teaching information. An activity chart for each prescription is left with the parent. The chart describes in behavioral terms what goal is to be accomplished, how often the skill is to be practiced, what behavior is to be reinforced, how it is to be reinforced, and how to record the behavior. The behaviors to be learned from birth to five years of age are in five developmental areas: cognitive, language, self-help, motor, and socialization. Advantages of the Portage Project are: that learning is occurring in the parent and child's natural environment; there is direct and constant access to behavior as it occurs naturally; the maintenance of desired behavior will likely be enhanced if the behaviors have been learned in the

natural environment; and the training of parents, who are already natural reinforcing agents, will provide them with the skills necessary to deal with new behaviors when they occur. The Portage Project shows that parents can effectively teach their children.

The mother-child home program in New York (Rosenfield, 1978) involves a toy demonstrator coming to the home twice a week with a new toy or book every week. The demonstrator works with the child and the toy and is observed by the mother. Then the mother works with the child observed by the demonstrator. The program is designed to enhance the intellectual, emotional, and social development of young children in order to prevent later learning and behavioral problems at school. Participants of the program had far fewer school problems and generally showed more promise for good school achievement and sound mental health in the years ahead. This program in contrast to the Portage Project deals with broader parenting skills and child stimulation techniques which many parents do naturally, but with which this group of parents needed help. The mother-child program, like the Portage Project, was carried on by a parent in the home working with the child after having received some training from a home visitor.

The Parent Readiness Education Project (PREP) in the Redford Union School District near Detroit (Wagner, 1977) has four components: classroom activities once a week for children in groups of twelve, regular parent-training sessions, assigned daily home activities, and both academic and practical training for high school students who receive regular credit for working with the program's preschoolers.

The parents' commitments include: daily home activities; keeping a journal of experiences, questions, and suggestions; attending orientation meetings, weekly sessions from October to May, and six adult evening classes. The home activities range from games and puzzles to cooking and shopping experiences. Each activity must provide a valid learning experience, take only a few minutes to complete, and the materials used must be those regularly found in the home or readily made during the school session. Most of the PREP students go on to perform successfully in regular elementary classrooms. Their parents learn better parenting skills and develop a closer rapport with their children. In the PREP Program the parents are used to reinforce what their child has been exposed to in the weekly classroom activities. They are used as reinforcers not primary teachers as in the Portage Project.

Preschool Instruction for the Exceptional program (PIE) in New Jersey (PIE Project, 1978) is an early intervention program designed to help handicapped children function more effectively and help parents understand their child's special needs. Parent involvement consists of a newsletter put out twice a year; telephone calls; opportunities for parents to talk to the head teacher two afternoons a week; individual conferences at school or home; participation at professional conferences and workshops; classroom observations; once a week group interaction sessions with the PIE psychologist; attending evening parent-staff meetings; keeping a book with pertinent program information and additional materials such as articles, exercises, etc.;

and participating in the lending library of toys and other educational materials. Parents' evaluation of the program indicated that they were satisfied with it. Again, in this program as in PREP, the parents' participation consist of reinforcing what their child has been taught in the school. Both programs, PIE and PREP, give the parents professional help in order to improve their interactions with their child.

The following programs involve the parents in a reading and/or language program. The Oakland School Reading and Language Clinic (Peters & Stephenson, 1979) first involves the parents in a program to show them positive and effective ways to interact with their children. It teaches them how to become more responsive communicators with their children in order to facilitate their child's oral language development. Then the parents are requested to observe every session their child has with the staff member. The staff then illustrate the use of social reinforcement and demonstrate to parents simple activities to reinforce skills taught at the clinic. The Oakland Schools Reading and Language Clinic prepares parents of referred children to become more productively involved in their child's problem thus assisting the parent and greatly helping the child.

The Preschool Readiness Outreach Program (PROP) (Vukelick, 1978) has two formats, weekly workshops and monthly pamphlets. The goal of the weekly workshop is for parents to construct an educational game which will help their children develop a skill basic to beginning reading. The monthly pamphlets suggest ways for parents to use readily available activities to stimulate and extend their children's beginning reading and language skills. Many parents could have trouble with

this program since it does not provide any background information for the parent in reinforcement techniques and teaching strategies.

Through a series of reading workshops in District 10 in the Bronx, New York City parents are shown how to help their children (Adams, Lerner, & Anderson, 1979). In these workshops the parents are given specific ideas and help in making games to help their children with relationship concepts, sequencing, visual and auditory memory, phonic skills and visual and auditory discrimination. This program, too, like the one described above, does not give the parents any basic skills in teaching or reinforcement. Some parents might not need instruction in these but it certainly would do nothing but improve parents' ability to work with their child. The parent involvement in all of the aforementioned reading programs is as a reinforcer of what the child is learning from the teacher.

One program that does not fit into the categories of preschool or reading is the North Carolina Project (Rosenfeld, 1978) which involves autistic children. The program consists of an individual treatment program to be carried out at the center on an outpatient basis by trained staff, with parents as observers; and a home program to be carried out by the parents working with their child regularly between visits to the center. To acquire the skills and confidence required to work effectively with their own child the parents watch the professional interact with their child, receive supervision of their own demonstrated behavior with their child, discuss child management problems with staff, and share problems and possible

solutions with other parents in the program at regularly scheduled parent group meetings. The parents are asked to keep a daily log in which they record changes in their child's responses to each section of the home program. Both parents also fill out a weekly rating of their child's progress in other areas of home life. The initial demonstration project yielded dramatic improvement in some children and more modest, but significant, gains in many others. This last program gives parents the help and knowledge to be effective teachers of their child. The program is also a good example of home and school working together for the benefit of the child.

Of all the programs reviewed the better ones seem to do three important things: give parents instruction in behavior management, reinforcement, and teaching strategies; continually evaluate the parents' teaching; and have the parents record the child's progress.

## CHAPTER III

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has dealt with parents' involvement in the education of their handicapped child. The involvement starts even before the child is born because the parents have started to develop feelings and attitudes toward their offspring. The parents' feelings and attitudes effect their behavior toward their young person. These parent-child interactions effect the child's whole person including school achievement and success. If the parents have negative feelings toward their child this could adversely effect the child's scholastic achievement. The parents need to seek help to put their situation in perspective, learn to accept their child as is, and take joy in their child. Parent involvement also includes finding the appropriate educational placement and being part of the team that develops the individual educational program for the child. To do this the parents must be knowledgeable of special programs, their child's needs, and their rights and the child's rights granted by the law. The school personnel should be the ones to give the parents the above information. Once the child is placed in an appropriate program the parent should be able to track the progress and be able to evaluate

the effectiveness of the program with regard to the child's needs. To do this the parent must keep in contact with the school. Most schools have parent-teacher conferences or home visits to report to parents the progress of their child and to gain insight into the family life of the child. To help their child the most parents should try to have a more direct involvement in their child's education. The direct involvement might have to be initiated by the parent or it may be asked for by the teacher but in either case it will benefit the child as recent research has pointed out. Direct involvement of the parents in the education of their child, however, takes preparation on the part of the parent and the teacher. A system for recording progress and a method of evaluation of the total program should also be initiated.

Direct parent involvement in education is relatively new so there are many areas which need further research. Most programs involving parents directly with the education of their child are during the child's preschool years. Research should be carried out to see what improvement can occur if parents are involved in later school years. Specific programs should be researched for their effectiveness using a control group. Also, research should be done to note if there is any significant difference in teaching effectiveness between parents who have received instruction in behavior management, reinforcement, and teaching strategies and those who have not.

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